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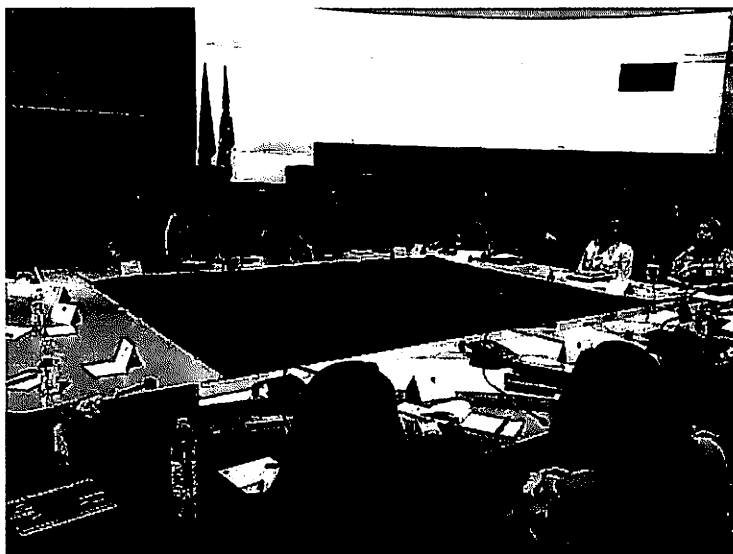


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Loudoun women get to work at first Commission on Women and Girls meeting

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Thursday, Apr. 20, 2017 by Sydney Kashiwagi, skashiwagi@virginianewsgroup.com | 1 comments | Email this story



Loudoun women gather at county government center for first Women's Commission meeting. Times-Mirror/Sydney Kashiwagi

How should a woman sitting in a Loudoun County jail whose sentence is almost up go about finding a job and marketing her skills during a job interview?

What kind of signs should girls know how to identify in a partner so that they can avoid an abusive relationship down the road?

Those kinds of issues and many more are ones the new Loudoun Commission on Women and Girls say they plan to tackle.

The commission, spearheaded by Chairwoman Phyllis Randall (D-At Large), held its first official

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meeting Wednesday night, where co-chairs of the 18 issue-specific committees met and brainstormed the body's next steps.

Randall plans to oversee the commission for the next two years and let it stand on its own once her term is up in 2019.

Loudoun resident Christine DeWitt, a mother of two girls and former corporate attorney, will serve as the commission's chairwoman.

The commission will also aim to help Loudoun women and girls with financial planning, employment, etiquette coaching, social media safety, domestic violence and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics field.

For many of the commission's chairs, their decision to join the body was personal. Many of them are mothers to daughters in the Loudoun County Public School system, others have been victims of domestic abuse, and some have had first-hand experience competing for success in male dominated industries.

Valerie Kaiser was once a homemaker in an emotionally violent relationship and needed to figure out how to balance her finances in order to get out of the relationship. Through that experience she was able to go on to become the co-founder and partner of financial planning firm EldenStreet Financial.

Kaiser will serve as the commission's financial planning specialist and hopes to use her experience to help other Loudoun women in need.

"Everyday I felt more and more powerful," she said.

Ekta Singhal, a former software engineer and consultant, now runs her own science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) enrichment academy for northern Virginia children.

But before that she was one of eight girls in a male-dominated engineering program.

"The need to encourage young girls in STEM is very real, and we need to act," Singhal said.

Singhal wants to partner with the county schools and bring more resources for Loudoun girls to get interested in STEM.

Randall decided to continue with the commission independently after the Board of Supervisors voted along party lines in January to deny the creation of the commission.

After that vote, Randall vowed to use county facilities to hold meetings for her initiative, use taxpayer money from her district budget to fund it and post information about the initiative on county websites and through her chair newsletter. But the chairwoman changed course in February and said she would use only use privately raised money for the group.

"My legacy won't be a road that's built ... my legacy will be people," Randall said on Wednesday.

The co-chairs of the commission will now start selecting additional members to join their issue-specific committees.

Comments

Fri, Apr 21 at 07:25 AM by Eastern Loudouner | Report this comment

Of course all people can use support, MEN and women. My question: if you are using county resources, isn't that using public money for the group? I would hope the disparity in how women are treated and viewed in the county hierarchy is a top priority. In other word, clean up your own yard first.



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